SOME THOUGHTS ON PROGRAMMING A UNIVERSITY RADIO STATION

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SOME QUESTIONS....

ABOUT THE SOUND OF A RADIO STATION:

1. Should a University radio station SOUND like a University?
2. If so, should it present this "sound" by teaching, by informing?
   Can it also "entertain" and still "sound" like a University?
3. Should it seek its audience on campus, among the "top 5 percent", or among the general population?
4. Does the general population need another radio station?
5. If it doesn't think so, should the audience have another station anyway? Does the University feel obligated to expand its role in community affairs, and can this best be done through a mass medium such as radio?
6. If the audience is dissatisfied with existing programming, is it the University's function to provide better mass audience programming?

ABOUT SOUNDS AND MONEY:

1. Can and should a University enter the broadcasting business for profit?
2. Can a radio station sound like a University and still turn a profit?
3. If so, can and should the University maintain standards of taste and judgement in programming?
4. If the commercial station were unable to turn a profit, or if the University were to decide against fully commercial broadcasting, could the University bear the cost of subsidizing a radio station?

5. Could the University establish ~~in~~ a semi-commercial station, selling its time only to cover certain expenses, without hoping to cover all costs or produce a profit? That is! Does a station become half a harlot in order to get half a loaf?

ABOUT PEOPLE:

1. Will there be a continuity of personnel to provide responsible broadcasting?
2. How can the University provide creative executive management for the student staff? Could a student perform this function?
3. Can a Lehigh station perform a service to a Lehigh Valley audience through a staff recruited chiefly from a body of out-of-town students? Could they meet the needs of the audience in the community?

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SOME ALTERNATIVES:

Let us make some assumptions for the purposes of this discussion.

For example, let us assume that the existing radio stations have tried virtually every kind and style of programming in order to lure the Lehigh Valley audience. They have hit high and low borws. The result is fair economic ~~kx~~ success for a number of stations which sound alike, and financial failure for WFMZ, which tried to offer "culture" and went out of business.

Since netowrk broadcasting is a relatively unimportant element in radio today (NBC, CBS, ABC, and Mutual are almost reduced to providing news service alone...network entertainment programming runs at most to 35% of the network schedule) it is the independent, music-and-news, format which ldominates the market.

The audience is therefore free to choose only ~~kxx~~ among disc-jockeys, who differ chiefly because some play more rock-and-roll than others. The listener's choice is fundamentally among personalities, or anbincers, rather than among basic styles in programming. The stations which still maintain their ~~k~~network affiliations occasionally offer good news reporting and analysis and fine "live" music concerts, but this is a minor element ~~m~~in their total schedule.

Thus, if Lehigh Universiity should attempt to broadcast for profit, it must be prepared either to battle for a low-to-middle range of ~~kxx~~ audience taste or to attempt classical, semi-classical, and informational programming in such a way that it will be both appealing and commercially successful. Since the radio market in the Lehigh Valley already seems crowded, a low-to-middle level of broadcasting by the University could very well lead to a bitter commercial war, perhaps jeopardizing the relations betwéen the University

and the community.

To program for a classical music audience, for profit, would present the challenge of succeeding where at least one station has failed. Lehigh, with its resource of people, might be able to succeed. However, there is at least some danger that it would succeed because it was able to ask its professors to become culture-jockeys....performing for radio in addition to their other duties so that the radio station could stay in the black.

The professional performers in the Valley might call them "scabs".

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The above is intended to pixture the broad choices among possible patterns of commercial programming. It is likely to suggest that the area of commercial broadcasting is not impossible for the University, but might be hazardous.

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Therefore, let us consider the programming alternatives the University might pursue, without regard for profit.

All of the approaches depend primarily on recorded music. Without enormous resources of money and talent, "live" music programming is impossible on a constant basis....though it should be encouraged as a feature of a regular schedule. Music can be presented with or without or interruption, and the interruption can be interesting, informative, and entertaining....or pointless.

Music, for most broadcasters, is a neuter quantity. It is delightfully non-controversial, it is cheap....and most stations that fill their schedules with it can be replaced by home phonographs. But when we discuss the fundamental "sound" of a station, it might be wise to start with this largest single ingredient.

We begin at the bottom:

1. The University could decide to program popular music, catering to the fans of the Hit Parade and the rating sheets. It could offer news "on the hour", with bulletin interruptions, just as several stations in the listening area now do. In effect, this would be mimicry of k existing low-brow stations, but without commercials. The justification would seem to be that the absence of commercials, in itself, would be sufficient blessing.

2. The University could offer popular music as a programming base, with the addition of some information in the form of substantial newscasts, panel discussions, lectures. The fundamental purpose of such broadcasting might be to reach a mads audience through the attraction of popular (even "rock" and "top forty") music, and to offer that mass audience a taste of valuable information. This approach assumes that while the horse may not want to drink, he might just be tricked into sipping now and then. This pattern is now offered by stations which program popular music locally, and carry the CBS or NBC Radio Netowrks, which provide brief packages of news and information features each hour.

3. The University could offer light concert and gentle popular music in line with the format of WPAT, in Patterson, New Jersey, with the addition of information features. This would seem to be directed the the audience for a "wall-to-wall" sound, and which does not wish either to be insulted or ~~kx~~ enlivened.

4. The University could pursue a "serious music" schedule, offering the finest of classical music throughout the day, with additional information programming supplied through the University, through news agency reports, and through outside sources. This might also include hours devoted to purely scholastic material...lectures and the like. Such programming would seem to rest on either, or both, of two assumptions:

   a) That there is a minority audienxe that is not now being served, and deserves to be served; and

   b) That there is a mass audience which should get a dose of this kind of listening on the chance that it might learn to like it.

5. The University could program a full range of music, as a base for its schedule, from jazz through the classics. It could assume that there is something of value in nearly every form of music, and attempt to accompany it with commentary that would be both entertaining and informative. In addition, it could provide news and feature information, and educational material, to accompany this base of music.

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Somewhere among these various musical formats the University may be able to find one that suits its taste. It must then move to the question of the non-music sections of its schedule, and the purposes they must serve.

This immediately brings up the question of the contribution a University can make to broadcasting, and why a University should become involved in broadcasting to the public in the first place. To present the same kinds of material available now offers nothing new to the public.

~~The University~~

But by repeating the present pattern of broadcasting, it could benefit in two ways: It could conceivably broadcast at a profit, and it could offer a training ground, for its students, through the station.

If these are not sufficient reasons to open a new FM station, then the University must be prepared to offer material that is not now available to the audience, and for which it sees a need. This could be commentary of all kinds...in the fields of music, the arts, literature, education, news, public affairs, government...etc. It could accompany music, or stand alone. It could be offered by University staff members and students or by outsiders. It could draw on the local community or the entire world.

The combinations are endless. But a University radio station, programming eight hours each evening, could be expected to present at least:

Two 15-minute newscasts...possibly at 6 and 11 pm.
Two early-evening hours of quality "light" music.
Two evening hours of classical music.
Thirty minutes of music "live" or recorded at a concert scene (conceivably a tape exchanged with another university)
One hour of jazz
Thirty minutes of discussion, originating with campus personnel
Thirty minutes of lecture or discussion from an outside source... an exchange tape from BBC, for example)
One hour of community service, perhaps combined with music, offering notices of local importance, book, theatre, motion picture reviews...interviews.

On nights when special concdrt or sports programming is available, it might replace some of the scheduled material.

"Exchange" material means what it says. If Lehigh is to receive material, it just be prepared to supply some.

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This is a quantitave klist, and may be quite unsatisfactory when the principal concern is for quality. It is merely a suggestion of some of the kinds of programs that might be presented on a given night.

The availability of material is never a problem, but it is a dedided problem to find talented and persevering contributors wo prepare and present it month after month.

To attract them, a program department must offer these people virtually complete freedom to present their material as they wish. Not necessarily in their own dramatic terms, for the station's staff may wish to assist in production work, and offer advice. But the idea content, within the bounds of good taste, will have to remain as the professor or student or analyst or annotator wants it to be. (If he shudders at Mozart, so be it; a pro-Mozart expert will be along shortly.) Similarly, if he is for high tariffs, and against the Mayor of Bethlehem, the station had best be prepared to give him his air time, so long as the guest stays within the libel laws.

The presentation of these challenging and sometimes challengable views is what produces worthwhile listening. It is, in effect, an expansion of the free spirit of a university from the campus to the community at large.

If a broadcasting station cares about its material, o there is an off-chance that some listeners may care, too.